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Political Implications of Stagnant Agricultural Productivity in Cambodia

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When Cambodia gained independence from France in late 1953, the country's economy was overwhelmingly agricultural. By 1962, eighty-one percent of the productive population was still engaged in agriculture, and sixty-five percent of the productive population were rice cultivators.(FN1) Mechanization was almost nonexistent and fertilizers were expensive. Cambodian peasants utilized a variety of methods to overcome a scarcity of labor in the production process, including cooperative, reciprocal labor arrangements.

Though Khmer peasants utilized reciprocal labor arrangements to overcome scarcity in the means of production, these arrangements were temporary agreements between households rather than permanent social structures. The agricultural economy was based on the family unit, which was the only clearly defined social grouping in rural Cambodia. Khmer villages had no formal associations, such as religious cults. The only social networks in the community other than blood and affective kin networks were cooperative work teams "organized primarily for agricultural labor at certain stages of the rice cultivation cycle when the household alone could not supply enough manpower."(FN2)

Peasants with financial needs sought out private moneylenders or rice brokers and either borrowed rice (if they had a deficit caused by a small harvest), borrowed money, or occasionally sold property. Bank credit was unavailable in rural Cambodia in the 1950s and 1960s. Nearly all short-term credit given by private banks went to commercial enterprises, instead of agricultural or industrial production. The 1963 nationalization of the country's banking system by Cambodia's ruler, Prince Sihanouk, did not alleviate peasants' need for credit, and the state's Royal Cooperative Office (OROC), designed to provide low-interest loans to cooperative farmers, was "inefficient, if not blatantly corrupt."(FN3)

Because fellow villagers usually did not produce enough of a surplus to extend loans in kinds, peasants commonly borrowed money to purchase rice for food or inputs needed for next year's harvest. Loans were repaid in rice. Peasants usually required loans prior to the harvest, when the purchase price of rice was high, and were forced to repay the loan after the harvest, when market prices for rice were relatively low. Interest averaged ten percent per month, and land was used as collateral.

The lender usually designated which parcel was mortgaged, and normally selected the borrower's most productive land.(FN4) Though debt was common, complete loss of land was infrequent. Peasants normally paid off their debt after one year, but often borrowed again to compensate for shortages caused by repayment of the previous loan or a bad harvest. This process resulted in an endless cycle of debt for many peasants, which pushed them closer toward the limits of subsistence. Delvert found that in different provinces indebted farmers ranged from ten to seventy-eight percent of the peasant population in 1956.(FN5) A colonial survey conducted in 1952 reported that nationwide, seventy-five percent of Cambodian peasants were significantly indebted.(FN6)

Widespread debt during the 1950s and 1960s did not create a large rural landless population

exploited by feudal-style landlords. Data indicates a decrease in per household landholdings between 1930 and the early 1960s, but not a definitive trend toward landlessness, especially in comparison with Viet Nam during the same period. Some peasants became landless during this period, but concentration of landholdings mainly occurred among "middle peasants" owning between one and five hectares. Land ownership did not become consolidated in the hands of a minority of rich landowners.

Prud'homme concluded in 1969 that gross agricultural production in Cambodia had increased greatly since the turn of the century because of the expansion of cultivated areas. Rice yields remained constant at approximately one ton per hectare, one of the lowest rates in the world. By 1966, Cambodia's per capita agricultural productivity was only 87% of 1960 levels. Furthermore, rice production and land area under cultivation did not expand as rapidly as the country's population.(FN7) One cause of decreased productivity was the increased parcellization of land; as far back as 1950, a rural household's land was distributed over an average of 7.22 plots.(FN8) Another productivity loss was caused by debt. High levels of debt among subsistence producers prevented any capital investment in agricultural production. Peasants became caught in a vice as land holdings decreased, parcellization and debt rose, and production per household plummeted.

Rural economic problems translated into a general decline in agricultural production after 1964. As shown in Figures 1 and 2 for the years 1960 to 1967, national per capita labor productivity and crop yields for rice cultivation declined precipitously after 1964.(FN9) How did such a decline affect the Cambodian state? During the 1960s, the primary sources of Cambodia's foreign exchange were exports of rice and rubber, which together composed 82% of Cambodia's exports by value in 1964. By 1966, rice exports had declined 60% in terms of both tonnage and value. The value of the country's rubber exports began dropping in 1965. The result was a drastic worsening in Cambodia's trade deficit.(FN10)

When exports declined and deficit spending grew, the government attempted unsuccessfully to increase extractions from the countryside. In 1966, one year prior to armed action by members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), the state created a collection system to purchase as much rice as possible through government channels because of the large amount being lost to export through black-market sale to Vietnamese communist forces. That year an estimated 130,000 tons of rice had been sold by peasants to the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, while 170,000 tons were exported legally.(FN11) The government collection campaign was enforced with army units and prices offered by the state were as low as one-third of the black market price.(FN12) In addition, the government presence in the countryside, as measured by the size and effectiveness of rural development programs, began to decrease. For example, after growing from 83 million to 385 million riels between 1955 and 1962, the government's expenditures on public health declined in real terms.(FN13) Rural development, as measured by indicators such as infant mortality rates, remained low.

After Cambodia gained independence in 1953, its state was relatively weak. There were few effective political linkages between the government and the country's rural population. Though Prince Sihanouk, as the head of the government, was immensely popular with peasants as a political leader, stable political institutions that incorporated this popularity into legitimacy for the state itself did not exist. Political participation at the village level was effectively limited to voting in elections for village chiefs and representatives to the national assembly. The electoral process in practical terms was meaningless. Village chiefs had no articulation to national political institutions, and national assembly members were "vague and remote" individuals whose candidacies were vetted by Sihanouk.(FN14) Cambodian peasants had no institutional

means of affecting government policies.

The politico-economic consequences of a deteriorating rural economy were twofold. The state became parasitic, gobbling up foreign aid to cover operating expenditures, which prevented any aid from being used for long-term development. Simultaneously, the worsening economic situation experienced by Cambodia's peasants was easily converted into political opposition. As Kiernan states, in reference to the 1967 armed uprising in the town of Samlaut, the increasing impoverishment of peasants created a "vast reservoir of peasant unrest that lacked only a reasonably sophisticated leadership."(FN15) This leadership was provided by communist forces (both Khmer and Vietnamese) which capitalized on the state's political and economic weakness in the countryside by rapidly taking control of peasant agricultural production in most areas of the country.

After 1970, the state's remaining political support among peasants rapidly disintegrated as bombing drove millions of farmers from their fields into urban areas and the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese communist insurgencies eliminated government military forces from the countryside. By 1973, the very existence of the Khmer Republic depended on the continued applications of U.S. B-52 strikes.(FN16) The states was totally dependent on foreign aid. Once the Khmer Rouge cut supply lines to Phnom Penh, the war was over, and a new state, Democratic Kampuchea (DK), arose out of the ashes of Cambodia.

The leadership of the DK regime professed the goal of creating a purely egalitarian agricultural society by leaping all intermediary stages of socialist evolution. What resulted was a society composed of slave labor, state appropriation of agricultural produce, and death. As aptly put by Vickery, "rationality seems to have been overridden by political and ideological choice" in Democratic Kampuchea.(FN17) All phases of agricultural production were controlled by the state. Cities were emptied and money was abolished. Household agricultural production was eliminated; agricultural labor was collectivized into cooperatives composed of as many as three thousand people.

Peasants and inexperienced former urban residents planted and harvested crops under the supervision of armed cadre, who then sent produce to locations specified by DK administrators for stockpiling. Though cadre remained well-fed, peasants were forced to survive on inadequate amounts of food. As the DK regime progressed, life in most parts of the country grew harsher. Food rations for the population were decreased and by 1977 communal meals consisted of rice gruel. Reduced food rations, hard labor, lack of medical care, and the "apparent targeted slaughter of adults" resulted in the deaths of approximately 1.05 million Cambodians during the DK period.(FN18)

The state, under the direction of a small group of Khmer Rouge leaders, attempted to liquidate what were perceived as past, present and potential future enemies of the central authorities. Often this included peasants. In the DK's final period, massive purges directed from the Pol Pot-controlled center destroyed a significant portion of the state's regional administrative structure, and approximately 100,000 cadre, soldiers, and peasants from the DK's Eastern Zone died through starvation and execution in a little over six months.(FN19)

The Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia on 25 December 1978, and the DK regime rapidly collapsed. Phnom Penh was taken on 7 January, and a new government, the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Council (KPRC), was formed. The KPRC was composed of former DK cadres from the Eastern Zone who had broken away from Pol Pot, Vietnamese-trained members of the CPK, and other Cambodians sympathetic to the new government. The KPRC soon evolved into the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), controlled by the Khmer People's

Revolutionary Party (KPRP).

In early 1979, the PRK was faced with the economic wreckage left by the DK regime and a hungry population. Armed opponents of the PRK, including the Khmer Rouge, continued fighting in parts of the country. Cambodians migrated to their former homes in search of relatives and consumed the large quantities of rice stockpiled in abandoned DK storage facilities. In other areas, retreating DK military units destroyed any food supplies they could not move with them. Regular rice planting and cultivation was not extensive and the wet-season rice crop produced only 285,000 tons on 700,000 hectares of land.(FN20)

The top priority of the PRK was thus the revival of agricultural production. In 1979 the government nationalized all land and tried to collectivize production. In such a chaotic situation, the government's land policy offered the potential benefit of land security for peasants: land could not be sold or transferred for repayment of debt, and the state controlled the country's financial system. Traditional forms of usury were effectively blocked.

Agricultural production was organized around krom samaki, communal production groups. Though similar in name, they operated differently from the massive collectivization that occurred during the DK period. Krom samaki were usually composed of between ten to fifteen families. Krom samaki leaders, appointed by khum (subdistrict) and village level officials, distributed land to individual households on an informal basis.(FN21) In many locations the local administration merely ratified ex post facto the farming of land that peasants had settled upon after the collapse of the DK. In other locations, where land from the initial distribution to peasants was insufficient, the state specified that land not being communally farmed by the krom samaki should be assigned to cooperative members for household production.

Theoretically the krom samaki was based on collective production, with output divided among households on the basis of the manual and draught animal labor each member contributed to production. A work point system, outlined by the PRK in August 1980, allocated communal production according to the number of days worked. A certain amount of the production from each krom samaki was to be set aside for state personnel, primarily local-level authorities and military forces.

Also in August 1980, the KPRC adopted a resolution specifying the importance of the "family economy" in agricultural production. To augment family incomes and to supplement diets, each household, regardless of size, was to receive 800-2,000 m[sup2 as a private garden plot.(FN22) The government announcement also stated that a portion of the food produced in the krom samaki should be sold to the state in exchange for agricultural implements and consumer goods. Apparently PRK leaders regarded communal production as too low for industrial use or for feeding the urban population, and "tried to encourage increased voluntary production and sale of surpluses for the secondary and tertiary sectors" of the Cambodian economy.(FN23)

By 1983, PRK government documents classified krom samaki into three categories. In Level One krom samaki, all means of production were collectivized and yield shared on a work-point basis after payment of collective debts and taxes. Draught animals remained the property of individual families. In Level Two krom samaki, land was divided and farmed by family units. After-tax production was not appropriated by the cooperative but kept within the household. Labor-intensive tasks, such as plowing, transplanting or harvesting were performed collectively. Level Three krom samaki contained family-based groupings with all labor and material inputs provided by the family; outputs were sold privately and not through the krom samaki. Informal labor exchange occurred between family members and neighbors.

Workpoints, used to calculate returns to peasants from cooperative production were based on

the time, rather than effort, spent cultivating communal land. The krom samaki lacked a mechanism to distinguish the quality of labor performed in the cooperative, and peasants did not have a guaranteed return on their labor. Farmers concentrated on cultivating private plots, the produce of which could be sold privately. Though central and provincial authorities existed to purchase rice at numerous locations, peasants could sell to private markets as they wished. Government controls on interprovincial travel prevented private trading on a national scale for most of the 1980s, but at the local level non-state markets could operate. Collectivized production within the krom samaki became a function of the availability of draught animals and other means of production, which in some localities "would have in any case imposed cooperative labor."(FN24) Often krom samaki leaders provided false data to the government to gain access to state-subsidized agricultural inputs, which were in turn sold to households by local authorities.

The PRK created a credit mechanism in an attempt to generate surplus production which could be acquired by the state. The national bank extended loans to khum administrations for state purchase of rice produced in krom samaki collectives. The khum administrations could sell manufactured consumer goods through state shops to repay the loans to the central government. However, Cambodia's factories were still mostly inoperable and goods produced by state-controlled industry did not exist. By 1985, industry accounted for only five percent of Cambodia's GDP, compared with nearly twenty percent in 1970.(FN25) State stores offered only a few goods and peasants had little incentive to buy them. The failure of the state to recoup agricultural outlays explains 1984 figures obtained from the national bank, which stated that out of 18 million riels loaned to Kandal provincial commerce offices for the purchase of rice, only 8 million riels had been repaid.(FN26)

By the end of 1985, communal production was nearly non-existent. At the Ninth Party Plenum on 30 August 1984, the KPRP passed a resolution to give village and khum officials land plots for tillage so that they no longer depended on food received from communal krom samaki production. The resolution was included in a decree on land management by the Council of Ministers on 6 May 1985. To acquire the plots specified by the central government, local officials redistributed land. Because this gave cadre a source of income independent from production from the krom samaki, local officials no longer had an incentive to enforce communal production, and communal land was parcelled out to individual peasant households.

Peasant agricultural production in 1985 was still at subsistence levels, constrained by the scarcity of inputs. There were only 1.2 million draught animals for plowing in 1985, compared with 2 million in 1969. New land had been brought under cultivation during the 1980s, but the total cultivated area was substantially less than the amount farmed in the 1960s. In 1969, approximately 2.5 million hectares were cultivated in Cambodia; the most land cultivated under the PRK was close to 1.8 million hectares.(FN27) To feed its growing bureaucracy and military, the state periodically increased its purchase price for rice, but there were no corresponding increases in production.

The PRK also attempted to compensate for low rice sales to the state through taxation, which began in 1983. The taxes were collected by provincial administrations, which were controlled by the Cambodian military. Euphemistically called "patriotic contributions," the taxes varied according to land productivity. The Ministry of Agriculture set the tax at 120 kilograms of rice per hectare for land producing more than two tons of rice, 100 kilograms per hectare on land producing between one and two tons, and 80 kilograms per hectare on land that produced less than one ton.(FN28) Patriotic contributions were to be paid in cash generated by the sale of rice

directly to the state for a fixed price or to the private market.

This agricultural tax rate, six to ten percent of production, compared favorably to the 1960s, when peasants were subject to taxes, high interest payments on debt, and occasional forced contributions to the state for development projects. But collection of patriotic contributions was sporadic due to weakness of the government administration, especially when warfare against rebel forces escalated in 1985. Cautious attempts to collect the tax resumed in 1987, but by 1988 the PRK had reduced the tax rate to half the 1983 level.(FN29)

Collectivization of the countryside as a means of increasing production proved impossible. By 1989, krom samaki existed only as convenient units of organizations for the purposes of taxation, dissemination of government policy, and military recruitment. And despite impressive gains compared with the early 1980s, the improvement in rice yields had tapered off to a level too small to earn foreign exchange through exports. Food self-sufficiency for the country was not guaranteed and in some years external food aid had been required to cover shortfalls in the domestic rice harvest.

In December of 1987, peace talks began between the PRK and the resistance movements of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in an attempt to reach a political solution to the long-running guerrilla war in Cambodia. Viet Nam completed the withdrawal of its army from Cambodia in September 1989, and the military forces of the CGDK were expected to increase their attacks against the government army to bolster their position in peace negotiations.

The PRK soon came under additional pressure from a reduction in foreign aid. The Soviet Union supplied Cambodia with approximately US$130 million in annual aid during the latter 1980s, and between eighty and eighty-five percent of Cambodia's trade was conducted with Soviet bloc countries, funded via Soviet import credits. In 1989, Cambodia imported 111 million rubles (US$200 million) worth of commodities from socialist countries, which included basic items such as fertilizer, oil, cement and steel. Exports were valued at only 27 million rubles. With the disintegration of communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the massive economic aid that had helped to support the PRK bagan to disappear. In 1990, the Soviet government informed the PRK that by the beginning of 1991, Cambodia would "have to pay for Soviet goods in hard currency."(FN30) When the Soviet aid pipeline was shut down, the government deficit was covered through the printing of money, which raised inflation.

The failure of government policy to move peasants from subsistence to state-appropriated surplus production, when coupled with the drastic decline in foreign economic and military aid, presented PRK leaders with a choice: liberalize the economy to stimulate agricultural production, and thereby build peasant support and revenue opportunities, or collapse. The leadership of the PRK chose to initiate a program of economic reform. Government policies bagan to introduce private property and other aspects of a free market economy. The PRK was renamed the State of Cambodia (SoC), though the government remained a one-party socialist state. Economic reform appeared to some observers as a KPRP attempt to "improve the government's popular appeal... following a political settlement of the Cambodian conflict."(FN31)

On 11 February 1989, Cambodia's National Assembly approved changes to the country's constitution which declared that peasants had usufruct and inheritance rights to land that was theoretically the property of the state. The amended Article 15 of the constitution stated that

citizens enjoy the full right to occupy and utilize new lands, and have the right to inherit landed property distributed by the state for housing and exploitation.(FN32)

The state's policy change was emphasized at the Second National Conference of Cadres of the

KPRP in April. During his opening speech, Chea Sim, politburo member and chairman of the National Assembly, declared that the objective of the Conference was "to strive to accelerate the cause of socioeconomic restoration and development."(FN33) Conference resolutions delineated three separate types of land rights that could be given to peasants: ownership, possession and concession. Peasants received the right to own land occupied by dwellings. Agricultural land that had been cultivated for one year by households after state distribution qualified for possession rights. Concession rights applied to other types of land for a limited period of time.

These possession rights were declared by the government to be inheritable. Though krom samaki continued to exist for administrative purposes, new government policies made no mention of collective production. Resolutions spoke of krom samaki provas day, solidarity groups which operated on the basis of mutual aid and traditional forms of cooperative labor. The 1989 resolutions were popular among the peasants, mainly because the reforms were interpreted as granting peasants the right to own land. Only twelve percent of the krom samaki contained collectivized land at the beginning of 1989, but even these cooperatives were dissolved, and farming returned to traditional mutual aid or private systems throughout Cambodia.

The KPRP released an amended Cambodian constitution in May of 1989 that confirmed the legality of private ownership of property and free markets. The constitution's article 18 stated that "the private property of the people concerning gains from their labor, legitimate gains, and other legitimate property is protected by law." Article 19 stated that "citizens or production units can sell their products."(FN34)

However, statements by the KPRP leadership were often contradictory. The government's land ownership policy remained confusing during economic liberalization. In a statement in June of 1990, the government obscured the issue by declaring that:

This policy on tenure and utilization of land clearly states: All land in the State of Cambodia are (sic) state property. On the granting of rights to ownership of land, the state shall reallocate land occupied since liberation day on 7 January 1979 in conformity with the cadastral regulations... In the current period when the law on land ownership is not yet issued, the state has decided to issue a temporary land ownership certificate to the public.(FN35)

When liberalization was introduced by the state, economic problems in the agricultural sector initially intensified. Very few of Cambodia's rice-growing areas were irrigated, causing an almost total dependence on rain for a successful crop. State assistance to farmers ended, and often state agricultural goods that had been distributed to krom samaki were abandoned. Approximately 600 of the 1,600 tractors the PRK had received as foreign aid during the 1980s were unserviceable because of the lack of spare parts.(FN36) In 1990, farmers could only afford to purchase ten thousand kilograms of fertilizer, only about twelve percent of the amount needed according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.(FN37) Despite these economic problems, most Cambodians were eager to have production fully under private control.

Because national multiparty elections were part of the political settlement to the Cambodian war, the KPRP was aware of the need to maintain popular support, and the ruling party continued to promote privatization of peasant agriculture. At the national party congress in October 1991, the KPRP changed its name to the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) to reflect the political shift away from socialism. The congress adopted a party platform that reaffirmed the government's goal of a free market economy, and that also sought to assuage peasant concerns about the security of land cultivation rights.

In 1993, elections sponsored by the United Nations were held. Though boycotted by the Khmer Rouge, a multiparty political system was established. Election results produced a

coalition goverment led by the CPP and FUNCINPEC, the political organization led by Prince Ranaridh, son of Cambodia's former ruler Sihanouk, Ranaridh shares the position of prime minister with Hun Sen of the CPP, and Sihanouk has regained the title of King of Cambodia as a constitutional monarch.

What was the performance of Cambodia's agricultural sector during the PRK/SoC period from 1980 to 1992? As shown in Figure 1, after rising dramatically from below 1.0 ton per hectare in 1983, rice yields have hovered near 1.3 tons per hectare since 1986. Using population data from a Cambodian government survey conducted in 1982, and assuming a baseline population of 6.5 million in 1980, national labor productivity in rice cultivation is calculated at a fairly constant 0.25 tons per capita from 1986 to 1992, shown in Figure 2.(FN38) During this period, rice production was the dominant sector in Cambodia's economy; in 1992, rice production accounted for a higher proportion of Cambodia's GDP than any other productive activity, including wholesale and retail trade, the entire industrial sector, forestry, and livestock.(FN39) Rice cultivation is still the basis for livelihood for the majority of Cambodia's population.

However, peasants continued to produce rice at subsistence levels, and the country often required external food aid after 1980 to compensate for deficits in the rice harvest. The absence of surplus rice production during the 1980s deprived the PRK/SoC of Cambodia's largest pre-war source of export earnings. Peasant indebtedness to moneylenders reappeared under the PRK, though not at levels comparable to those of the 1960s, and the state was unable to provide investment capital to the agricultural sector. By some standards, Cambodia's economy was in worse shape during the 1980s than it was prior to 1970. In April 1989, the PRK's deputy premier stated that Cambodia's GNP in 1989 was estimated to be only eighty percent of 1969's, and that per capita income was lower due to the corresponding increase in population.(FN40)

Are present rural conditions different from those during the 1960s? Economic and political reforms, begun in 1989, have not created yet a sound economy and acceptable living conditions for the majority of Cambodians. Approximately eighty-five to ninety percent of Cambodia's population continues to live in rural areas, mostly household cultivators, but food security for peasants is not guaranteed. Since the 1993 elections, Cambodia has suffered annual food deficits in varying regions. Following disastrous flooding and drought in 1994, the director of World Food Programme operations in Cambodia stated that the national shortfall in rice for that year was 150,000 metric tons, and in 1995, rice shortages were projected to reach 300,000 metric tons.(FN41) Cambodia's population growth rate is high, estimated by various sources as being between 2.6 and 3.2 percent. Because of the labor-intensive nature of Cambodian agriculture, and the scarcity of labor caused by the high death rate during the Khmer Rouge period, one would expect the additional labor provided by population growth to have a positive effect on the agricultural economy. Yet production is stagnant.

The International Monetary Fund found that Cambodia's rice production in 1993 was 9.8 per cent less than the annual average rice production for the years 1963 to 1967, with a population approximately 1.5 million greater.(FN42) Figure 1 shows that rice yields after 1984 are higher than those during the 1960s. However, per capita productivity is as much as sixty percent less during the same time periods, as shown by Figure 2. The paradox of lower average per capita productivity and higher yields is explained by the decrease in land area cultivated: in 1967, Cambodia had 0.3865 hectares under rice cultivation per capita; in 1992 the amount is only 0.1991 hectares cultivated per capita. Although yields are higher after 1985 than in the 1960s by as much as thirty percent, the land area cultivated is one-third less. Expansion of cultivated area is constrained by such factors as infertile soils requiring fertilizers, which most cultivators cannot

afford to purchase, the lack of functioning irrigation systems, and the continuing danger of landmines in many parts of the country.

Because rice cultivation determines the income level of the largest portion of Cambodia's population, the absence of marketable surpluses will restrain Cambodia's overall economic growth. Perhaps more importantly, persistent agricultural problems may lead to distinct socio-economic polarization between an increasingly impoverished peasantry and an upwardly-mobile tourism and service-based urban sector that is supported by the majority of foreign development aid coming into the country. If increases in the rural population are not matched by increases in labor demand (e.g., if new areas are not brought under cultivation), there will be a lower return to labor in the agricultural sector and the economic situation of peasants will deteriorate.

This process is being facilitated by a breakdown in democratic institutions in the Cambodian state, in which the economic needs of rural Cambodians are eclipsed by maneuvring among Phnom Penh's political elite. The coalition created by the 1993 UN-sponsored elections, composed of the CPP, FUNCINPEC and the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), is under pressure from factional infighting and personal rivalries. The BLDP has suffered a split within its leadership between party president Son Sann, and Ieng Mouly, the government's Minister of Information, who is supported by the CPP. This split is endangering the BLDP's position within the government; on 30 September of this year, grenades were thrown into a BLDP office in Phnom Penh during a party meeting, and an outdoor rally in support of Son Sann held the next day was disrupted by military police. The rally had been banned by Hun Sen and Prince Ranaridh.

The CPP and FUNCINPEC, while vying with each other, are attempting to eliminate voices of opposition from within their own ranks. The most significant event has been the October 1994 ouster of Sam Rainsy from his position as finance minister. In June 1995, he was expelled from FUNCINPEC, after which he was removed from his parliamentary seat. Rainsy ran afoul of the government for criticizing corruption that exists at all levels of the state administration and attempting to reform state financial practices. These and other recent activities have led Amnesty International to conclude that individual politicians are at risk in Cambodia.(FN43) The government has also made recent moves to clamp down on press freedom. Editors have been arrested and jailed, and some newspapers critical of the government have been fined and forced to cease publication.

The shifting political alliances among members of Cambodia's national government are attempts to consolidate power prior to the next round of elections that are scheduled for 1998. If the process continues, corruption will remain endemic, rural development programs will be ignored, and the already weak economic linkages between the state and the countryside will disintegrate further. Approximately forty-five percent of foreign development aid is consumed within Phnom Penh, and the Cambodian state is already dependent on foreign aid for operating revenue: eighty percent of the state budget is paid by external assistance. The combination of a huge rural population struggling within a subsistence economy, and a corrupt, foreign-funded government creates a weak economic foundation for a state's existence. It also can bring into question the state's legitimacy among a peasantry distant from the political machinations occurring in Phnom Penh.

The key variable in Cambodia's economy at the present time is whether economic reforms and development programs will translate into increased agricultural productivity. If peasants become able to produce a surplus for the market, they will be able to invest in agricultural inputs and in bringing new land under cultivation. Should the agricultural sector remain at subsistence levels,

new land will not be brought under cultivation, the rural population will continue to increase, and more peasants will be marginalized in a process similar to that which occurred in the 1960s. Worsening economic conditions and the lack of institutional means to affect government policy will cause the peasantry to look toward political alternatives to the current Cambodian state.

These political alternatives can easily take the form of peasant-based political organizations. Though the Khmer Rouge lacks the military strength and popular support to stage a return to political power, other opposition movements can form if peasant conditions do not improve. Cambodia has a long history of armed organizations contesting the government's control of the countryside.(FN44) A bloated, corrupt army cannot crush political opposition everywhere in Cambodia, as proven by the continued survival of the Khmer Rouge. Challenges to the state could arise from within the army itself. Government leaders already fear possible coup attempts mounted by opposition factions. Because of the weak structure of the Cambodian state and the fragile nature of the country's agrarian economy, the historical events of thirty years ago may prove relevant to the current Cambodian government.

Added material

Figure 1: Cambodian Rice Yields

Figure 2: Cambodian Per Capita Rice Productivity

FOOTNOTES

* Dept. of Political Science, University of Hawaii.

1. Remy Prud'homme, L'Economie du Cambodge, Paris, Press Universitaires de France, 1969, p. 42-43.
2. Ibid., p. 181.
3. Ben Kiernan, "The Samlaut Rebellion," in Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua (eds.), Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea 1942-1981, London, Zed Press, 1982, p. 179.
4. Gabrielle Martel, Lovea: Village Des Environs D' Angkor, Paris, Ecole Francais D'Extreme-Orient, 1975, p. 145.
5. Jean Delvert, Le Paysan Cambodgien, Paris, Mouton and Co., p. 519.
6. Kiernan, "Introduction," Peasants and Politics, p. 8.
7. Calculated from data contained in Prud'homme, pp. 248-254.
8. Hou Youn, "The Peasantry of Kampuchea: Colonialism and Modernization," translated by Ben Kiernan, in Peasants and Politics, p. 36.
9. Data from Cambodian government statistics cited in Prud'homme, pp. 250-254. Prud'homme states that government figures for years after 1967 are unreliable.
10. Ibid., pp. 266-273.
11. Idib., p. 225.
12. Vickery, "The Samlaut Rebellion 1967-68," Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, p. 169.
13. Etcheson, Craig, The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea, Westview Press, Boulder, CO 1984, p. 61.
14. May Ebihara, Svay: A Khmer Village in Cambodia, Ann Arbor, University Microfilms Inc., 1971, p. 537.
15. Kiernan, "The Samlaut Rebellion," Peasants and Politics, p. 180.
16. See Etcheson for maps of the areas controlled by the government and communist forces during this period.
17. Michael Vickery, Cambodia 1975-1982, Boston, South End Press, 1984, p. 158.
18. Judith Bannister and Paige Johnson, "After the Nightmare: The Population of Cambodia," in Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia, Ben Kiernan, ed., Yale University Southeast Asian

Studies, New Haven, 1993, p. 67.

19. Ben Kiernan, "Wild Chickens, Farm Chickens, and Cormorants: Kampuchea's Eastern Zone Under Pol Pot," in David Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds., Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea, New Haven, Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1983, p. 197.

20. Joel Charny, "Appropriate Development Aid," in David Ablin and Marlowe Hood, eds., The Cambodian Agony, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1987, p. 244.

21. The PRK had decreed elections for krom samaki leaders, but in most cases elections were not held. See Viviane Frings, The Failure of Agricultural Collectivization in the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea (M.A. thesis), Clayton, Australia, Monash University, 1993, p. 9.

22. Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Ltd., Cambodia Country Profile 1990/91, London, 1991, p. 58. Grant Curtis reports the area for private family plots was 600 to 2,000 square meters, in Cambodia: A Country Profile, Stockholm, Swedish International Development Authority, 1989, p. 61. Michael Vickery reports 1,500 to 2,000 square meters, in Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society, London, Frances Pinter, 1986, p. 141.

23. Vickery (1986), p. 142.

24. Vickery (1984), p. 222.

25. International Monetary Fund (IMF), IMF Economic Review No. 8: Cambodia, Washington, DC, 1994, p. 10.

26. Vickery (1986), p. 137.

27. EIU, Cambodia Country Profile 1988/89 and 1993/94, from PRK Ministry of Agriculture statistics or EIU estimates.

28. Vickery (1986), p. 145-146. Curtis, p. 64, quotes slightly different figures: an average of 100 kg/ha for land producing more than 2 tons, up to 100 kg/ha for production of 1-2 tons, and 80 kg/ha for less than 1 ton.

29. EIU, Cambodia Country Profile 1993/94, p. 103.

30. Murray Hiebert, "Khmers' Other Battle," Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), 8 Nov 1990, p. 61.

31. Hiebert, "Change in the air," FEER, 29 Jun 1989, p. 16.

32. Foreign Broadcast Information Services (FBIS), New Law Amends Articles on Property Tenure," East Asia Daily Report, 18 Feb 1989, p. 54.

33. FBIS, "Party Cadres National Conference Opens," East Asia Daily Report, 6 April 1989, p. 52.

34. FBIS, "State of Cambodia Constitution Released," East Asia Daily Report, 9 May 1989, p. 35.

35. FBIS, "Public Urged to Apply for Land Ownership," East Asia Daily Report, 1 June 1990, pp. 43-44.

36. Hiebert, "Farming out the land," FEER, 13 July 1989, p. 73.

37. Hiebert, "Basket case," FEER, 7 November 1991, p. 32.

38. This data forms the mid-range of Cambodia's possible demographic trends as calculated by Banister and Johnson in "After the Nightmare," p. 117. The author has used their estimate of a 2.8% population growth rate.

39. IMF, p. 60.

40. Hiebert, "War Against Want," FEER, 13 July 1989, p. 72.

41. FBIS, "International Appeal To Cope With Rice Shortfall," East Asia Daily Report, 13 December 1994, p. 57.

42. IMF, p. 76.

43. Fitzgerald, Trisha, "Cambodia: Human Rights," Voice of America broadcast, Phnom Penh, 4 October 1995.

44. See Ben Kiernan, "Resisting the French 1946-54: The Khmer Issarak," in Peasants and Politics, for discussion of one such movement.

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